



Swan River Gardens

Growing Asparagus



Growing tasty asparagus is something all home gardeners should try. A small patch of good ground can yield one of spring's best bounties year after year.

Select a site with full sun that can be left undisturbed for at least ten years. Rows can be spaced as little as one foot apart. Two six foot rows will grow enough spears for a family of four to enjoy fresh asparagus once a week during spring. Preparing the soil is the most important step for success. Asparagus is a heavy feeder that needs to start in soil that is rich in organic matter and has loose texture. The tender spears need to come up from deep below and heavy or compacted soil will be too difficult for them to push through. Amend native soils generously with compost or well rotted manure. We recommend that you improve soil to a depth of 1 to 1 ½ feet. If you are making a patch in your garden you should still amend the soil.

Start your asparagus patch with the 'crowns' sold at Swan River Gardens. Although you can start asparagus from seed, it will take quite a few years to get much yield. The crowns are 1 year old bare root plants. After you take the crowns home, it is important to get them in the ground within 24 hours or so. If you are unable to plant them promptly, keep them cool and moist until you can.

Asparagus is usually planted using the 'trenching method'. After amending and improving your soil, dig a trench about 1 foot deep and pile the soil you remove right next to it. Place your crowns, pointed side up in the bottom of the trench. Spread the roots out in a circle and cover them with about two inches of soil. Do not compact the soil. As the spears grow, add more soil from your pile, about two inches at a time to just cover the tips.

When you have filled in your trench, you are done. Do not harvest any spears the first season. You are helping the plants to develop strong crowns and stems to support many years of harvest. The spears will grow and sprout the airy foliage wild asparagus hunters look for. In fall, cut these down and spread a layer of compost about two inches deep on the bed.

The following spring, before any spears have poked up, again spread about two inches of compost on top of the bed. You are maintaining good soil texture and providing nutrition for the growing plants. This second season, you may lightly harvest a few spears as they first come up. Be sure to stop harvesting about half way through spring and allow the plants to produce foliage again. A healthy asparagus bed will be your reward for your patience!

Once more in fall go ahead and cut down the stems and top dress with compost. The following third spring, get out there early to apply fresh compost before any spears have appeared. Now in your third year, harvest to your heart's content. You have established an asparagus bed that will provide many springs of tasty treats! Beds may wear out after ten years or so and need replanting but beds that are fed and watered faithfully typically last much longer. If you notice diminished yields, it is a sign that you may need to replant your bed. Start over with fresh crowns and repeat the process for amending your soil.